

TRENT FRANKS for his hard work on this important issue. I rise today in support of the Pain Capable Unborn Child Protection Act.

Children are gifts from God—before and after they are born. They are tiny humans with endless potential and complete innocence.

This bill would stop the practice of ending these precious lives after 20 weeks of pregnancy, except in cases of rape or incest or necessity to save the mother's life.

Similar laws have been passed in about 16 states, and this Chamber passed similar legislation in 2015. The United States is 1 of only 7 countries that does not ban abortions of these 20-week-year-old unborn babies.

Science indicates that, at about this age, these children have the physical structures needed to feel pain.

We do not want anyone to have an unwanted pregnancy, but we want mothers to know that abortion is not their only option. And we want these children protected from pain and harm.

Mr. Speaker, it is time to protect our Nation's most innocent from inhumane suffering and premature death.

#### CONGRESSIONAL BLACK CAUCUS: GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE IN NATURAL DISASTERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Ms. PLASKETT) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

##### GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. PLASKETT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to include any extraneous material on the subject of this Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands?

There was no objection.

Ms. PLASKETT. Mr. Speaker, it is my great honor to rise today to anchor this CBC Special Order hour.

Today, Monday, October 2, members of the Congressional Black Caucus will be speaking on the floor about the devastating impact of natural disasters, particularly hurricanes, and the critical role of the Federal Government's response.

In the wake of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and now Maria, the Federal Government has already deployed assets to affected regions, from HHS public health resources, the Coast Guard, the Urban Search and Rescue Task Force, to Corps of Engineers flood-fighting projects.

In the coming weeks and months, additional resources will help shelter displaced Americans and get businesses back on their feet. Congress must also ensure that the Federal response to these disasters is just and equitable, and that communities of color are not directly or indirectly harmed by recovery efforts.

During this time, we will hear from other members of the Congressional Black Caucus and its friends to discuss

this issue. For the next 60 minutes, we have a chance to speak directly to the American people on issues of great importance to the Congressional Black Caucus, Congress, the constituents we represent, and all Americans.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PAYNE), from the city of Newark.

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands, Congresswoman PLASKETT, for hosting tonight's Special Order hour on the Federal Government's response to natural disasters. I believe that Ms. PLASKETT and the experience that she has had in her homeland can open our eyes to the devastation that has taken place in the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico as well.

It is unthinkable what these American citizens have been through over the last several weeks and will continue to suffer for months into the future.

Before I begin, I have a message for the families and the friends of the 58 innocent people whose lives were taken and the more than 500 who were injured in Las Vegas overnight: The country's compassion and thoughts go out to you. Our hearts break with yours.

For those injured, know that the American people are praying for your recovery.

To the first responders who put their lives on the line daily: Thank you.

What went down in Las Vegas last night was an act of terrorism. There is no other name for it. A deranged man with a small arsenal of firearms in a hotel room shot into a crowd of people at a concert. For an hour and 12 minutes, people watched the chaos unfold.

All the moments of silence in the world won't change what happened last night in Las Vegas, last year in Orlando, the year before in Charleston, and the list goes on.

Moments of silence used to be for showing honor or respect. There is nothing honorable about keeping silent and doing nothing to prevent gun violence. There is nothing respectful about rejecting every single reasonable gun bill proposed in the past decade.

What kind of Nation are we when we sacrifice human lives on the altar of the gun lobby?

The time to act was yesterday. The Federal Government has a moral duty to protect the welfare of American citizens before tragedy strikes. Yet, when the news moves from one disaster to another, we often suffer a sort of amnesia. We don't seem to remember or learn from our mistakes. We forget to fix the problems our citizens call us about every single day, and the problems inevitably repeat themselves.

One issue we seem to have repeated amnesia about is the high cost our constituents face when evacuating disaster areas, particularly after hurricanes. We read reports that, due to reduced capacity and high demand, flights are full or tickets are prohibitively expensive. Even if the airlines capped flight

prices, like they did last week, Federal taxes and fees can increase the price of an evacuation by 20 percent.

Recently, this hit home for me. One of my district staffers had family stuck in Puerto Rico. Because Hurricane Maria knocked out power and the telephone lines, my staffer had no way of knowing whether her loved ones were alive or dead. Many constituents have contacted our offices to let us know the difficulty they were having in trying to find out whether their loved ones were safe or not and how we could help.

She tried to get in touch with her family for 8 long days before hearing that they were okay. Then, when my staffer tried to book a flight for her family to get out of Puerto Rico, the only tickets available were for first class. First class. That is over \$700 on a flight full of disaster evacuees.

My D.C. staff did a little digging. Here is what they learned. The American people rely on the goodwill of the airlines to cap the prices of flights from disaster areas. The airlines decide when to start the cap and when to end it.

□ 2030

The airlines decide whether to keep selling first class tickets, and the Federal Government never stops charging taxes on flights from disaster areas.

American citizens deserve better, Mr. Speaker. That is why, starting this week, I will be introducing a series of bills to ease the financial burden Americans face when escaping natural disasters.

The humanitarian flight fairness package will do four things. First, it will allow the Secretary of Transportation to declare an aviation humanitarian crisis at specific airports covered by a Presidential declaration of emergency.

Second, it will allow the Secretary of Transportation to mandate that airlines charge no more than the median fair price of all seats sold on that route in the prior calendar year.

Third, the package would require the FAA to waive the \$5.60 passenger facility charge during an aviation humanitarian crisis.

And fourth, the package would require the FAA to waive the U.S. international transportation tax, which is \$18 on a flight from Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

American citizens, Mr. Speaker. Too often Congress reacts to crisis. It is time for us to be proactive. It is time for us to legislate before another disaster strikes. The humanitarian flight fairness package is a commonsense solution to a problem that directly affects our constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I always try to deal in common sense. As a matter of fact, I have a constituent back at home who constantly reminds me of how shallow I am, so I can do nothing but rely on common sense based on this constituent's feelings about me.

I want to thank the congresswoman again for hosting this Special Order hour, and I look forward to continue working with her as she addresses the issues faced by Americans affected by natural disasters, whether it is on the mainland or in the territories. They all are American citizens.

When it benefits this Nation to have Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands be a part of the United States, it does not hesitate. But when these American citizens are in trouble, they deserve the same rights that every American citizen benefits from in this great Nation—and it is great, and we want to continue to make sure that it remains great.

I continue to make the point, Mr. Speaker, that these are American citizens we are talking about. This is not foreign aid. This is not mutual aid. This is aiding American citizens in trouble, in disaster, in peril, no insulin for diabetics, no dialysis for kidney patients in two or three weeks. That is a death sentence, Mr. Speaker, and we cannot allow it to continue.

Ms. PLASKETT. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. PAYNE, my colleague, for those sentiments and that support to the people of the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico and to all the people of the Caribbean region. I am grateful for his empathy, for his support, the support of his constituents, as well as all the Members who have reached out to the Virgin Islands in these last several weeks.

The islands have been struck by something that is nothing less than cataclysmic in many respects, particularly in a time of year when we are preparing for what is right now our only viable and large industry, the tourism industry. We have lost that for this year. We have lost that on all of the islands, all of the regions at this time.

I know that so many of you have seen and expressed—so many Members on both sides of the aisle have come up to me and said, or texted or called and said, that they are there for me, and I am going to hold them to that. I am going to hold them to that because what we are facing in the Virgin Islands, I feel guilty right now—and I told my staff—being here, having air conditioning, sitting in a room. I feel guilty because I know what the children of the Virgin Islands are going through right now.

There is no air conditioning. There is no light on the islands right now. Many of the people, many of the communities are in utter darkness, and as the heat rises with the amount of moisture that is in the air, we know that there will be health hazards that are about to happen in terms of mosquitoes, with dengue, chikungunya, and all other kinds of diseases that are going to be occurring.

Mr. PAYNE. Will the gentlewoman yield?

Ms. PLASKETT. I yield to the gentleman from New Jersey.

Mr. PAYNE. Let me just say in terms of your guilt. It is not a guilt. It should

not be guilt. It is an obligation for you to be here in the people's House to represent your constituents here, to be their voice. That is why they sent you here to Washington. So do not be guilty about doing the job you have been sent to do.

Ms. PLASKETT. I know that that is why I am here because I need to be their voice, because they are voiceless right now. If you look on national media, you hear about what is happening in Puerto Rico, and, Lord knows, I feel for our fellow islanders, our brothers and sisters over there, but very rarely do you hear about what is happening in the Virgin Islands.

On September 6, Hurricane Irma, one of the most powerful Atlantic storms this century, destroyed the islands of St. John and St. Thomas, the islands that are part of the district that I represent. Three weeks later, the island of St. Croix was devastated by Maria, a second Category 5 hurricane ripping through the U.S. Virgin Islands in less than a month. Both Hurricanes Irma and Maria have wreaked havoc in the U.S. territories of the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and other Caribbean nations.

We forget that there are other places in the Caribbean that have also been struck, St. Martin and Sint Maarten, Barbuda, Anguilla, our very close neighbors, the British Virgin Islands, Tortola, Anegada, Virgin Gorda, Jost Van Dyke, places that Americans love to go to, to vacation, to enjoy themselves, not thinking about the lives of the people that are there or not there anymore.

We know that right now the island of Barbuda is without an inhabitant, without an inhabitant in centuries. There is no one on Barbuda after the hurricane.

Turks and Caicos, Guadeloupe, Montserrat, one that also strikes me is Dominica. Dominica was not hit by the first Hurricane Irma, and that little island nation reached out to the U.S. Virgin Islands, reached out to Puerto Rico and said: We don't have much, but we are going to give you the money that we have. We, as a government, will give you 200,000. We will bring relief. We will bring whatever we can.

And 2 weeks later, Hurricane Maria struck them and has devastated that island.

Their Prime Minister went to the United Nations a week ago and begged, begged the support of the free world, begged the support of the members of the United Nations to support them.

Although the full extent of the two hurricanes' impact has yet to be assessed, it is clear that, in the Caribbean, the damage from these storms appears to be unparalleled.

President Trump issued major disaster declaration for the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. Dozens of deaths and hundreds of injuries have been reported alongside widespread infrastructure damage all throughout the Caribbean.

I received a text just this morning from members of my family who are

still looking for loved ones on the island of St. Croix. That is why, in the days and months ahead, we must continue to work together to ensure that the individuals and families impacted by these devastating storms receive all the aid they need. The catastrophic destruction caused by Hurricanes Irma and Maria demands massive amounts of aid to address the overwhelming needs of the countless victims who now face the daunting task of rebuilding their lives.

FEMA has been on the ground in the Virgin Islands even before Irma hit the islands of St. John and St. Thomas. There are now more than 12,600 Federal staff engaged in response and recovery operations from Hurricanes Maria and Irma in the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, representing nearly three dozen departments and agencies.

Storms of this magnitude require the full attention and support of the entire Nation. The people of the Virgin Islands have lost their homes and possessions. Businesses have been lost alongside hospitals, schools, utility systems, and other vital infrastructure.

To give you an example, after Irma, Roy Schneider Medical Center, the only hospital on the island of St. Thomas, was partially destroyed, its roof ripped off, its walls caved in, windows blown out. Patients needed to be evacuated to the island of St. Croix and to San Juan to be at Juan Luis Hospital on St. Croix and additional hospitals on San Juan, as well as the veterans facility there.

Of course, people were thinking that St. Croix, after Irma, would be the base. As people on St. Thomas and St. John were reeling from the devastation of Irma, post offices were gone, schools annihilated, mud slides began after additional rains, people in Coral Bay on St. John felt lost, isolated, trapped. Many people had days, almost weeks before they could get out and be in the rest of the public population.

When Maria came, Maria struck what we thought would be our base camp, the island of St. Croix, and as luck would have it, the only functional hospital left in the Virgin Islands, the hospital of Juan Luis was breached by Hurricane Maria and has now been condemned by the Army Corps of Engineers.

What facility will Virgin Islanders use? Will we continue to be in tents manned by the brave men and women of our military who have come down to support us? Will we operate from an operating room, an emergency room in a box, what they have given us thus far?

That can't be. We have one functioning operating room that is being held together by the good graces and MacGyvering of the men and women of Juan Luis Hospital right now. Should that be for American citizens?

I went on distribution lines. I went to grocery stores where people were waiting for hours. I am telling you hours—3 hours to get gas; 3, 4 hours, the entire time of a curfew, to go on a distribution line to get a couple of packs of

water and some MREs for a family, standing out in the hot Caribbean sun. People were sharing umbrellas, sharing water, singing with each other trying to keep their spirits up.

I met a man who had his veteran's cap on, Vietnam vet, people who are members of The American Legion and asking me: "I fought for this country; I am an American citizen; do they think about us? I have not seen us on the news. My family tells me that we are not on the news," because, of course, his TV is not working, because almost all of the Virgin Islands is in darkness.

□ 2045

We have been able, through the valiant effort of our water and power authority and the linemen and others who are out there, to bring power to critical structures; to our government house; to the main blocks in Christiansted; to parts of Charlotte Amalie, the capital of the Virgin Islands; to the airport so that relief planes can come in and out. That is who is in light right now.

But for so many others and children right now, it is darkness for them. The couple of hours that they have outside of the curfew are to be making the rounds to get ice, to keep insulin refrigerated in their homes, to keep milk for children and formula for babies cold before it goes bad. That is the daily struggle now of Virgin Islanders, American citizens, veterans, people who pledge their allegiance to this flag, people who are proud to say that they are American citizens.

As we saw on the mainland in the United States following Hurricanes Katrina, Sandy, and, most recently, Harvey, Americans need to come together again with compassion and care. I have heard commitment from the President and my colleagues in Congress to the U.S. territories receiving the support they need.

Moving forward, I am hopeful, but vigilant, and I will make sure that they keep to their promise and their commitment that President Trump and this Congress delivers on the promises to support their fellow Americans in the Caribbean region. This is a plea by me on behalf of my people to keep us in your thoughts, prayers, and support in the coming months and years. May our collective attention span endure enough through the constant new cycle so that we can come together to move beyond relief to healing and prosperity.

This is an opportunity. I keep trying to tell our young people on the islands who are in despair, who have low morale, that this is an opportunity for us to leapfrog technology, to create the kind of Virgin Islands, for the Virgin Islands to be the beacon in the Caribbean region, the beacon of what American might can do when it does what it is supposed to do.

It is this Congress' constitutional responsibility to the territories. The benign neglect that this Congress has

gotten away with for the last 100 years needs to stop right now. They need to stop wagging their finger and telling Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands that they have not done what they are supposed to do when this Congress knows that they are not doing the right thing by those territories. Our formulas are different. The money that we receive is different. We get the short shrift on every bill that comes on this floor. Yet, still, you expect us to stretch that out like the poor stepchild that you think we are to make do and keep quiet.

But it is going to stop right now. We cannot be quiet anymore, because not only are we hungry, 30 percent of the children of the Virgin Islands live in poverty, but now we are blind as well. There is no cell reception in most of the areas of the Virgin Islands. While I was down there last week, my staff and I roamed the islands with our cell phones, sitting in bypasses, sitting in areas with others, trying to get a signal to plead with the National Security Council, plead with FEMA, and others to do the right thing by the Virgin Islands.

Given the enormity of the challenges ahead, the Virgin Islands will require the coordinated and sustained financial commitment of the United States. For this reason, I ask that Members of Congress fully support inclusion of funding in forthcoming disaster supplemental packages that will aid in short-term as well as long-term relief, recovery, and reconstruction of the Virgin Islands. The international community, including the United States, has an obligation to work with affected governments to restore infrastructure, provide critical relief, and help recovery and build back our islands. We must act quickly to save lives, ensure that those in the Virgin Islands are back on the road to swift recovery.

Listen, I know we are hearing that FEMA is on the ground, that supplies are there, and that things are moving along. I must admit, FEMA is on the ground. I see the supplies in the cartons, in the containers on our ports, and I hear the discussions at daily briefings that go on at our local emergency management system to how they are working hand in hand with FEMA. I believe that the Army Corps and the Department of Defense and FEMA are there and they want to lend a hand.

But something is not working, whether it is in the local government, a dysfunction there, or dysfunction in communications, or dysfunction at the highest levels of the Federal Government. Because when I go to neighborhoods like Whim, when I go to Tutu High Rise, when I go to Coral Bay, when I go to Hannah's Rest, when I go to Frederiksted and talk with people and they tell me they haven't had water in a week, something is wrong, and something needs to be done by this Congress that has the responsibility for the Virgin Islands.

How can a child in the United States say that they don't have water? How

can a child in the United States say that water is streaming over them because many of the roofs in many of these areas are completely gone?

So what I wanted to do was to walk the Members of Congress and you, Mr. Speaker, through the destruction that I have seen with my eyes in the Virgin Islands.

What you see right here is a home. This is a private homeowner's home completely gone. It looks like a construction site. It looks as if they are trying to start building when, in fact, this was someone's home before.

Additionally, this is another home that now looks like a construction site that people are living in. People can no longer be here. They have abandoned—they have had to leave this home.

I have additional things that I would like to show you.

This is a line right now of people to fill up some containers with gas so that they can keep generators going for a couple of hours a day so that their children can read, so that they can wash themselves, so they can find out what is going on in the outside world. People can listen to a radio to find out what is not being said about them by others.

Here is another home in the Virgin Islands. This is the kind of destruction that took place on the islands that I represent, the islands that are my home. This is all of St. John. Our transportation system between the islands has been completely obliterated. This is a ferry that was used between St. Thomas and St. John to bring goods, to bring people between those islands. The islands of St. John, Cruz Bay, Chocolate Hole, and Coral Bay now feel cut off, left out, because the ferry system has been down for many weeks.

Look at this. This is what is happening in the Virgin Islands right now. This is the main street in Christiansted. If you look over here, this is the government house, and this is what our roads look like after the hurricane. You can see that this roof is actually a part of the roof over here that has completely been sheared off by Hurricane Maria and strewn across the street. Lines are down and poles are down.

This is a commercial business on the island of St. Croix, a business that will take months, if not a year, at least, to recover if FEMA moves quickly on supporting a small business loan so that they can have the support that they need to be able to do that.

These are the things that you don't see on the news that the people of the Virgin Islands are dealing with right now. What is our greatest asset—and has been for some years after our oil refinery was closed, after this Congress in 2004 changed the rules for the American JOBS Act that took away many of our knowledge-based businesses, our financial services sector—is we have had to rely on tourism.

And this is a hotel room in one of our major hotels. This is what the destruction of the hurricanes look like in the

Virgin Islands right now. This is a hotel room that will not be available for the coming months for the people of the Virgin Islands to be able to sustain themselves with employment.

What I am showing you now was, at one point, two homes, two homeowners' families. You can see the two houses look literally as if a hurricane just came across them and smashed them with a fist from the top. You can barely make out what was once in these homes. These homes no longer exist. These people have no homes.

There is no temporary shelter designation right now. People are living in shelters in some of the few schools that are still intact, which means: Where are our children going to go to school?

Many of our schools have also been destroyed. What will happen to the children of the Virgin Islands? What will happen to us all?

Here is what some of the roads look like when we talk about the utility system and the need—or why we are in the dark in the Virgin Islands right now.

This is a major road. Can you imagine having this next to your house? Can you imagine this amount of transponders, transformers, in front of your home?

This is why most of the Virgin Islands are in the dark right now. This is what is happening on these islands.

This is someone's home. This is our industry. This is tourism right now in the Virgin Islands. This is a hotel room in one of our major resorts. Places known over the world—Caneel Bay on St. John—are gone, are obliterated, will be no more for 2 or 3 years.

What are the people of the Virgin Islands supposed to do? Are we asking for much?

We are asking for support. We fight in your wars. We begged when we became part of the United States to be part of the draft because we want to take on the responsibility of American citizenship. But under the Constitution, it is this Congress, Mr. Speaker, which has responsibility for the territories: Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Marianas. And I have to tell you that it has been a poor job that you have been doing of that responsibility thus far.

We get the short shrift in Federal funding in formulas. Let's not talk about the Affordable Care Act. We don't even have an exchange to have been upset that we lost an exchange. That was never given to us. The Virgin Islands, with 30 percent of the children living in poverty, still don't get the disproportionate share for hospitals that the rest of the United States get.

Why?

I can't get a straight answer about why we shouldn't have it, but we don't. Neither do the smaller island territories.

This is what we are left with. And we are asking you for your support. I am asking you for their support. I am beg-

ging for support for the people that I represent, because many Virgin Islanders are not going to beg you for support. That is not in them, that is not who they are. The biggest phrase that people have right now when I go around the islands after Irma and after Maria—both Category 5 when they struck the U.S. Virgin Islands—and I ask people, "How did you make out?"—that is now our new greeting for one another: "So good to see you. How did you make out?" And people's response is continually: "Thank God I have life. I am blessed I have life."

And when you have to press them to ask them, "What happened to your home," then they will just shake their head, "It is no more. My home is no more. But thank God I have life. I am good. We are good."

That is the kind of people who are the people of the Virgin Islands. So they are not going to beg this Congress for support. I am going to beg for them, because you haven't been doing it out of your own volition or what you know is right to do. You haven't done it thus far. What is happening in Puerto Rico is happening in the Virgin Islands right now.

As the sole representative here in Congress representing the Virgin Islands, I will continue the work that I have been doing in support of the islands' overall recovery efforts, including facilitating generators and security for local grocery stores, businesses so Virgin Islanders can get fresh food and goods, working with local shipping companies to clear the ports and bring commerce and relief packages to the islands, coordinating with housing support for the Red Cross and local shelters, as well as rebuilding efforts of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Additionally, I will continue to update my residents and businesses around the ongoing efforts to make sure that the U.S. Virgin Islands continue to receive the attention and support they need during these difficult times.

□ 2100

While the devastation of this hurricane season has been felt in many parts of our country, it is imperative that we make sure our Virgin Islands continue to be remembered and supported as we begin the long and arduous process of our recovery. We are hopeful. Virgin Islands' motto is "United in Pride and Hope." That is who we are.

I want to thank the Virgin Islanders who are living in the mainland because they, through their efforts, have bridged the gap. Our office gets calls continually from Virgin Islands associations in places like Houston, Atlanta, New York, Tampa, Orlando, Miami, good Virgin Islanders like Tim Duncan, who, through his own efforts, brought planeloads of support to the people of the Virgin Islands because we want to take care ourselves. We don't want to ask for your support. But it is your responsibility, Mr. Speaker, it is

the responsibility of this Congress to ensure that that is done.

I think back on, as a child, hearing stories about Casper Holstein. Many of you may not know the name, but many of you may know him from gangster movies, discussions about New York at the turn of the 20th century. He was a Virgin Islander who created something that everybody calls the numbers system in New York.

After a hurricane and a tsunami in the Virgin Islands, he, of his own pocket, reached in, commissioned a ship, and sent that ship filled with goods for his fellow Virgin Islanders back home.

That is what is happening now because we can't always count on the Federal Government to do what is right by us. We have to count on ourselves. But I am going to make sure, and I will fight continually with those colleagues on either side of the aisle, whomever is willing to, to support the people of the Virgin Islands, to ensure that their efforts are not in vain.

Let me give you a statistic when I talk about veterans and us willing to fight. In the last five conflicts, Virgin Islanders have paid the ultimate price, have greater casualties, three times the national average per capita. We send our sons and daughters on the regular to fight our wars. That is not a duty that we shirk from.

Are you shirking from your duty to us, of your responsibility to us?

I understand, as I have said, FEMA is on the ground, but there are children who are not getting water. There are old people who are eating MREs that others have brought back to them. Is that what should be happening?

Not everybody can get to a distribution center. Not everybody can carry packs of water on their shoulders, on their heads, on their back a mile, whatever it is, to get back to their home because, as crazy as it sounds in this day and age, not everybody owns a car, not everybody can do that. So this Congress has got to figure out a way.

I know that Ranking Member CUMMINGS and I issued a request on September 29 for my good friend—and he is my friend, TREY GOWDY, chairman of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee—to express our extremely grave concerns about the dire status of recovery efforts in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, requesting that the committee hold an emergency hearing this week with officials from the Department of Defense, Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, as well as from the White House.

The committee this week, I know, has no hearings, no business meeting, no activity scheduled for the entire week, and this issue is in desperate need of rapid and robust oversight. Millions of American citizens residing in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are facing massive calamities, widespread disease and death, and we need to help them now.

Lieutenant General Russel Honore, who commanded Joint Task Force

Katrina, recently warned the administration's response to this humanitarian crisis is replaying a scene from Katrina. Admiral Paul Zukunft, the Coast Guard Commandant, warned this week that the victims feel betrayed, they feel isolated, and they are probably getting a sense of betrayal of "where is the cavalry?" Everybody else is seeing what other individuals in Puerto Rico have said and their concern for what is happening.

Now, I want my colleagues to know, I am not necessarily saying that it is the Federal Government's fault. If it is the fault of local government, then shame on them and let's expose that for what it is, because all I am concerned about is the welfare of the people of the Virgin Islands, not protecting local government, not protecting bureaucracy, whether it be at the Federal level or at the local level.

Let's have this hearing. Let's get that information out.

The fact that there is no functioning hospital in the Virgin Islands should scare the heck out of us. I was in the hospital at Juan Luis on Wednesday and watched doctors and others creating lists of people, how to get them off the island, how to get our disproportionate amount of dialysis patients off the island, how they were going to deal with those who have shunts, heart disease patients in the coming weeks with one makeshift operating room that they were working out of.

How were they going to do that? How were they going to operate out of a tent that the Army was setting up when we still have a month and a half of hurricane season in the Virgin Islands, in the Caribbean? We are not going to be able to continually ship people off the island, fix them up, triage them, and get them off.

Our labor and delivery: What if there is a child with special needs when they are born? What about neonatal services, if that is needed, for a child that is born during this time? God help us. And if you don't act, God help you in this time of need of your fellow Americans.

I want to thank those Members who have reached out to me and who have expressed their desire to support and help us. Thank you. I am calling on you now for that help to make sure that the people of the Virgin Islands do not continually feel forgotten.

I want to thank House Democratic Leader NANCY PELOSI, who recently issued a statement calling for the swift and immediate financial commitment to help rebuild the Virgin Islands.

I want to thank my Republican colleague, JENNIFFER GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN of Puerto Rico. She and I have been continually texting. I remember texting with her through Maria as she and her brother were holding the door of their home in Puerto Rico, trying to ensure that Maria did not get in that house. Thank you for your support. Thank you for your sisterhood as we both go

through this, and how ever you need me, I am there for you.

Republicans must join Democrats; Democrats must join Republicans in Congress to address the needs of the communities in crisis by swiftly passing a robust relief package that provides assistance not only today, but throughout the long road to recovery. This is our chance in the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico to show American might, to show American technology, to show American strength.

President Trump, you have complained about the other islands not wanting to support us when we go to the United Nations or the Organization of American States against places like Venezuela or Cuba or China. Show that they can vote with us because Americans do what they are supposed to do for the islands that they have responsibility over.

How are they going to trust us if we can't even take care of what belongs to us?

Our fellow Americans in the Virgin Islands deserve to know that their government will be there for them without question or hesitation.

I want to thank the country of Denmark, our previous owner. Many of you know that the Virgin Islands have had seven flags that have been flown over those islands. We are a very valuable place. We are geographically situated in the mouth of the Caribbean Basin to support the United States. That was why we were purchased in 1970.

But we have maintained close ties with Denmark, and I want to thank the Ambassador and the Prime Minister, who reached out and said that they wanted to support the territory and submitted the request of the Danish Government to our own U.S. Government to bring their own additional emergency management agency to the Virgin Islands in support of ongoing efforts in areas such as healthcare, water purification systems, and experts, command control support, logistics for clearing, and security support. Thank you for your continued commitment to us.

Let that not be the only commitment that we have. I know that the Federal Government, the executive branch, is doing its part. Let this Congress do its part. Let this Congress show, in this time of crisis, that it can rise above partisanship and support the islands of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Let those 3.6 million Americans living in those territories—more than many States in this country—know that they have the full support of this Congress, of the American people, that they are not just a sound bite, that they are not just a rum and Coke and a pina colada when you decide that you want to get away from where you live, that we mean more than that to you, that we are, indeed, full citizens in this American experience, in this democracy.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, the 2017 Atlantic hurricane season was among one of the most active hurricane seasons on record. Four major hurricanes—Harvey, Irma, Jose, and Maria—left terrible devastation in their wakes as the United States and its surrounding neighbors were hit with historically catastrophic storms. As we know far too well, these storms caused billions of dollars in damage across Texas, Louisiana, Georgia, Florida, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and other areas in the region. Much like Hurricane Katrina, the effects of this devastation will be felt for decades.

The frequency and intensity of these storms continue to be an ongoing issue for our country, and it is a problem that is only further exacerbated by global warming. Warmer oceans and extra heat in the atmosphere caused by climate change provide even more fuel for weather systems. Studies are already demonstrating that storms are intensifying significantly faster today than they did 25 years ago. Additional water vapor in the atmosphere is also leading to extreme precipitation. In fact, Hurricane Harvey brought more than 50 inches of rainfall to the Texas Gulf Coast, representing the greatest accumulation of rainfall ever recovered in the contiguous United States from a single tropical storm.

As the costs of natural disasters continue to increase, we need to be cognizant of the impact of these costs on communities all across the United States—particularly communities of color or other areas where our most vulnerable populations reside. Federal disaster response needs to be fair and equitable across the board. Communities of color suffer greatly from natural disasters as many are left without housing or jobs to return to after the storm. Low income individuals and minorities suffer even greater when these events occur, making a strong and equitable federal response that much more important.

Mr. Speaker, we need to be looking at what we can do as Americans to support our fellow citizens and the steps that we can take to build more resilient infrastructure in the wake of such devastating natural disasters. Each and every American shares in the responsibility to face these natural disasters together as one nation, and we cannot afford to ignore entire segments of the population in the wake of these disasters.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I join my colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus in drawing attention to this year's catastrophic hurricane season that has severely impacted the Texas, Florida, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico this Hurricane Season.

The biggest challenge for residents of the 18th Congressional District is accessing the assistance that is available to them.

From getting rooms in hotels for those displaced by flood waters to finding Disaster Assistance Centers that are accessible—when so many cars were damaged by Hurricane Harvey flood waters.

This past Saturday, I joined with representatives from FEMA to provide critical information to Houstonians attempting to recover from the catastrophe of Hurricane Harvey.

Many of them are still waiting for home inspections and need answers regarding the appeals process and how best to utilize Home Inspection Teams.

I am calling on FEMA to create a new app to provide homeowners with instant status updates on the inspection process," said Congresswoman Jackson Lee. "This app should speed up the process of scheduling FEMA inspectors for a home visit if your home has not been inspected in more than 10 days.

This will help the many who are struggling to get their lives back in order.

This week, FEMA announced the creation of a new housing program under the Direct Housing Assistance Program, which allows FEMA disaster relief funding to go to individual homeowners or to local governments to provide housing. To be considered for this program, people must first register with FEMA at [www.DisasterAssistance.gov](http://www.DisasterAssistance.gov).

Local government immediate disaster assistance housing options are as follows:

#### 1. Multi-Family Lease and Repair:

Direct assistance to repair or improve existing multifamily housing such as apartments in order to provide more housing for survivors.

Properties must be three or more units, with each unit providing complete living facilities for cooking, eating, and sanitation. Hotels, motels, and extended stay hotels are not eligible at this time.

#### 2. Direct Leasing:

Direct Leasing: Enables local governments to lease a property that typically would not be available to the public, such as corporate lodging.

Local government enters into the lease agreement on behalf of individuals or households. Various types of housing properties may be eligible.

Manufactured Housing Options (Mobile Homes and Recreational Vehicles):

Direct housing places manufactured housing units on private land or commercial pads.

Local permitting may apply.

There are conditions to receiving housing assistance, but no assistance will be available if an application to FEMA is not made.

It is problematic for constituents from the 18th Congressional District, when I know that 81,950 FEMA applicants have been rejected.

I know that tens of thousands are still displaced with over a 1 million cars having been destroyed by flood water it is difficult to get to the Disaster Recovery Centers.

I continue to work to get more Disaster Recovery Centers opened before the October 24, 2017 deadline to make sure that FEMA resources are as accessible as possible.

We know that site for housing must be suitable.

There will be Hauling and installation included only for those people who have applied for FEMA assistance and have been approved to receive assistance.

An inspection of the site to determine suitability will be scheduled.

Partial Repair and Essential Power for Sheltering (PREPS):

PREPS provides minor repairs to homes in locations with limited housing options.

For eligible properties that have incurred limited damage displacing individuals from their homes.

PREPS provides basic, emergency home repairs—not to include finish work.

3. Direct Assistance for Limited Home Repair:

Program provides partial repairs to homes with significant damages.

Program can include partial repairs to a damaged home where alternative housing is not available or is not cost-effective.

FEMA will determine eligibility for permanent housing construction on a case-by-case basis.

All other forms of housing assistance must be exhausted before the program can be considered.

Some Hurricane Harvey survivors are getting an extension to stay temporarily in hotels while they look for an alternative place to live. October 14 is the new checkout date for the Transitional Sheltering Assistance (TSA) program, which pays for short-term hotel stays.

All applicants for FEMA recovery assistance have the right to appeal if they are dissatisfied with FEMA's determination letter. All appeals must be in writing and explain the reasons why FEMA's decision may not be correct. The appeal should include any documentation that FEMA requests or that supports your claim. Appeals can be submitted via computer by opening a Disaster Assistance Center (DAC) account at [www.disasterassistance.gov](http://www.disasterassistance.gov).

In addition to all of the needs of family are the needs of small businesses who are going to be instrumental in rebuilding our communities.

I will soon introduce a bill to provide grants of up to \$100 thousand to qualified small business owners to help them with Hurricane Recovery.

I thank my Colleagues of the Congressional Black Caucus for joining in this Special Order and I look forward to our efforts to meet the needs of people who are impacted by this hurricane Season.

I would also like to include in the RECORD an article from Vox regarding climate change:

[From [vox.com](http://vox.com), Sept. 28, 2017]

ONE OF THE clearest signs of climate change in hurricanes Maria, Irma, and Harvey was the rain.

Warmer temperatures are increasing the energy and moisture available to hurricanes.

The intensity of Hurricane Maria, which made landfall on Puerto Rico as a Category 4 storm on September 20, was part of why it was so devastating to the island and its weak infrastructure, leaving Puerto Ricans in a humanitarian crisis.

But this year's intense Atlantic storm season had another element tying its biggest events together: a monstrous, and sometimes deadly, amount of rain.

Images of the flooded metropolises of Houston, Jacksonville, and San Juan with overtopped dams, billowing sewage, and flooded homes show that torrential rain can be one of the most devastating consequences of hurricanes, especially in urban areas where concrete makes it harder for water to drain and where people can drown.

Scientists say the extreme rainfall events that feed these floods are on the rise for many parts of the world, and this year's hurricanes fit that trend. In particular, rising temperatures in the ocean and the air alongside booming construction in vulnerable areas are fueling the increased risk from massive deluges.

Of the seven hurricanes this year so far, Harvey, Irma, and Maria stand out not just for the amount of rain they dropped, but for how fast they dished it out.

WHY HURRICANES UNDER WARMER CONDITIONS CAN DUMP SO MUCH RAIN

Downpours go hand in hand with hurricanes, since the cyclones are powered by evaporating and condensing moisture.

Warm ocean waters provide the fuel for hurricanes, and warm air causes the water to evaporate. This moisture-laden air then precipitates as rainfall during a hurricane, dissipating the heat energy from the water.

"Tropical cyclones are very, very good at converging a whole lot of heat in one place at one time," said Kossin.

Air can hold about 7 percent more water for every degree Celsius increase in temperature, Kossin explained.

That means warmer air and warmer water could lead to larger, more intense hurricanes, which in turn lead to more rainfall. (The Saffir-Simpson scale only accounts for windspeed, but precipitation is closely linked to a storm's intensity.) Scientists are studying these links to understand how future storms will respond to these conditions.

"Hurricanes live and die by the amount of rainfall they make out of moisture," said George Huffman, a research meteorologist at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center.

But where that water lands depends on the speed and the course of the storm, and not all areas are equally vulnerable.

"We know that in particular that [the regions around] Houston, Louisiana, and Florida are prone to some of the most extreme precipitation events in the United States," said Sarah Kapnick, a researcher at NOAA's Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory. "We do see signs of precipitation extremes increasing in these regions."

It's challenging to make direct comparisons between extreme rainfall events since their weather systems (e.g., hurricanes, thunderstorms) behave differently, so scientists draw on several benchmarks depending on the situation.

These include the peak rate of rainfall, total volume of rain, the three-day average rainfall, and the maximum depth of rainfall. And all of these are separate from flooding, which is governed by local geography and how people use land, in addition to the rates and total amounts of rain.

"There is a difference between a 100-year rain event versus a 100-year flood event," Kossin pointed out.

HARVEY WAS ABLE TO DUMP AN EXTRAORDINARY QUANTITY OF RAIN BECAUSE OF HOW IT HELD STILL OVER HOUSTON

Hurricane Harvey hovered over the Gulf Coast in late August and dumped 33 trillion gallons of water on US soil, according to some estimates, and is now the wettest storm in US history.

"When a storm stalls, that has more to do with the larger scale flow fields it's sitting in," said Kossin. "That was just very, very bad luck."

The total volume of rain is easier to calculate when a storm remains over a fixed area, but it's much harder to suss out when hurricanes remain mobile and dump water over a wide swath of land and ocean.

NASA's satellite measurements reported rainfall rates from Harvey as high as 5.8 inches per hour (meteorologists define "heavy rain" as greater than 0.3 inches per hour), while the National Weather Service showed that a ground-based rain gauge in Nederland, Texas, reported 60.58 inches of rainfall, a new record.

Meteorologists still have to vet this number, but if confirmed, it would best the previous record—52 inches in Hawaii from Hurricane Hiki in 1950—by 8 inches.

The US Geological Survey reports that flooding causes an average of \$6 billion in damages and 140 fatalities each year. And this year was not an average year, with Harvey alone costing upward of \$180 billion and killing more than 75.

The waters from flooding can linger for days, causing injuries, spreading disease, and hampering relief efforts. The majority of Harvey's victims drowned after the storm, while others were delayed from life-saving care. In one case, a woman died from a flesh-eating bacterial infection after falling into the festering Harvey floodwater in her house.

## IRMA'S PEAK RAIN WAS OVER CUBA

Hurricane Irma, meanwhile, set a record for its sustained intensity.

"Irma was a complete standout: 185 mph and stayed there for a day and half," Kossin said. "These storms do not stay there that long."

This intensity was matched with a firehose of rain, dumping water at 10.8 inches an hour, reaching depths of 20 inches in Cuba and 15.8 inches in Florida.

The downpour led to flooding from 23 rivers and creeks in Central and North Florida, forcing highways to close. The state reported at least seven deaths from drowning.

In Cuba, Irma's storm surge overtopped the Havana seawall, while unrelenting rain turned the capital's streets into rivers, killing at least 10 people.

## MARIA TOOK DIRECT AIM AT PUERTO RICO AND THEN REGAINED STRENGTH

With tropical force winds reaching 230 miles from its center, Hurricane Maria completely engulfed Puerto Rico as it bisected the 100-mile wide island, picking up steam again one it was clear.

Satellite measurements already show that it poured as much as 6.44 inches of rain per hour and has left Puerto Rico shrouded in darkness.

The Cordillera Central mountain range that forms the spine of the island of Puerto Rico acted as a juicer for Hurricane Maria, Huffman explained.

Perhaps the worst blow from Maria was the 150 mph winds that knocked down 80 percent of the island's power transmission lines and 85 percent of its cellphone towers, leaving people in the dark and struggling to contact each other. But the flooding from rainfall has been a hazard too, including threatening to breach Guajataca Dam in the Western part of the island, forcing hundreds to evacuate.

At least 18 fatalities have been reported in Puerto Rico so far, including two police officers who drowned.

## THE CLIMATE SIGNAL IN DELUGES LIKE THESE IS EMERGING

No single weather event—even an extreme one—can be "caused" by climate change, as Vox's David Roberts has explained in detail. And when talking about hurricanes, researchers are quite hesitant to even estimate how much climate change is to blame. Huffman said he's not yet sure if this storm season is "unprecedented" in its ferocity.

However, rising average temperatures are definitely an important element of huge storms like Harvey, Irma, and Maria.

Warmer temperatures are driving sea level rise, which is increasing risks from the storm surges that often herald hurricanes.

Increasing heat is also warming up the ocean, and hotter air holds onto more moisture, increasing the available energy for hurricanes.

And independent of cyclones, extreme rainfall events are on the rise.

Kapnick noted that even individual rain storms can be overwhelming, like storm that drenched Baton Rouge last year with 31.39 inches of rain and three times the volume of water of Hurricane Katrina throughout Louisiana in 2005.

As the chart below shows, the amount of rain from a once-in-every-30-years rainstorm like the one that immersed Baton Rouge has gone up due to warming:

"In this region where we have known precipitation extremes, we have been able to detect an increase in precipitation extremes due to a warming climate," Kapnick said.

And scientists are getting better at figuring out when the torrential downpours are coming.

"If you pay attention, we've had a really remarkable series of forecasts," said Huffman. "For Irma, we knew four to five days in advance that there would be a sharp right turn. Twenty years ago, you wouldn't have dreamed of doing that."

"Everything we see is consistent with what we expect climate change to do," Kossin said.

## INSTRUMENTS SOMETIMES CAN'T STAND UP TO THE EXTREME WEATHER THEY'RE TRYING TO MEASURE

Huffman explained that researchers aim to combine different instruments to get a robust handle on rainfall.

"The gold standard is rain gauges because they physically collect the rain," said Huffman.

The next option is ground-based radar, which covers a wider swath of the weather than rain gauges, but less directly measures rain.

But take a look at what happened to a weather radar station in Puerto Rico:

This illustrates part of the challenge of attaching numbers to extreme weather events. Many of the systems used to track them are also vulnerable to them, leaving only indirect figures and estimates.

What's more, both rain gauges and ground-based radar have limited ranges, leaving vast stretches of ocean where hurricanes spend most of their existence unmeasured. And when a hurricane does make landfall, gales can knock them down.

"We don't really have anything on the surface [of the ocean] to tell us the details," said Huffman. "When the chips are really down, sometimes satellites are the only choice."

That means the full accounting for the rainfall from Harvey, Irma, and Maria could take months to deliver as meteorologists piece together their models with the measurements they have.

However, scientists are eagerly waiting for the dust to settle so they can confirm their suspicions about the record-breaking storms this year. The American Geophysical Union added a last-minute session for researchers to present their findings on Harvey and Irma at their December meeting.

"There's going to be a tremendous amount of research coming out in the next few months," Kapnick said.

## HONORING HELEN SMITH, POW ADVOCATE, ON HER 91ST BIRTHDAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HIGGINS of Louisiana). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GARRETT) for 30 minutes.

Mr. GARRETT. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT), my colleague.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Virginia for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honor to speak on behalf of a person I have come to know and love. In fact, the First District of Texas has been blessed to be the home of many remarkable individuals who have gone above and beyond to serve others in Texas and throughout the world.

It is indeed a privilege to honor a woman from Longview, Texas, who has dedicated her life to serving and providing comfort for our Nation's vet-

erans, particularly our prisoners of war. Her name is Helen Smith, and October 5 of this year marks her 91st birthday.

Helen's caring for our Nation's POWs began with her husband, Gordon Smith, a survivor of the Bataan Death March in 1942 and a POW until the end of World War II.

Throughout her long and happy marriage to Gordon, Helen gained a personal understanding of the struggles many of our veterans and former POWs endure; but armed with the knowledge of what our veterans and former POWs face on a daily basis, Helen set out into the world to help as many of our veterans as she possibly could. She spent countless hours in VA facilities ensuring veterans, young and old, got the care they so desperately needed and deserved.

Helen has walked the Halls of Congress advocating for our veterans and former POWs throughout her life. She is a driving force and was behind Public Law 97-37, which improved VA benefit programs for former POWs.

Helen is not slowing down even at her age. At 90, Helen would head over to the Longview Community Based Outpatient Clinic every morning at sunrise. She would make a pot of coffee and spend her day talking to veterans, giving them a sympathetic ear and helping them through the VA process.

It is a distinct privilege to recognize such a remarkable woman, to thank her for her tireless service to our veterans and former POWs, and to wish her a very happy 91st birthday.

Her accomplishments are recorded in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, which will endure as long as there is a United States of America.

I do thank my friend from Virginia for yielding.

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Mr. GARRETT. Much has been said recently about the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and specifically how in this land of the free we have the prerogative to do as we choose in matters that manifest themselves, as communication that we can speak freely even when that speech is objectionable to some.

And many people who have been fortunate enough to be amongst the 1 in 1,300 high school football seniors to take the field on a Sunday at an NFL stadium have availed themselves of this right that was given to them by people greater than themselves, perhaps who shed their very lifeblood that they might make a decision not to stand for the anthem that embodies the gratitude for that sacrifice.

Brian Tracy once said: "Develop an attitude of gratitude and give thanks for everything that happens to you, knowing that every step forward is a step towards achieving something bigger and better. . . ."

More recently, an individual said: "If you were successful somebody along